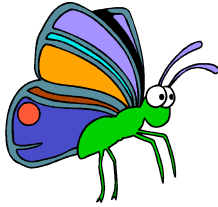


ALASKATELEHEALTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

"Promoting Telehealth
Efforts in Alaska"

Issue 3
April 2000

NEWSLETTER



Future of the Council by Facilitator Tom Nighswander, MD, MPH

There is a general consensus that the Alaska Telehealth Advisory Council (ATAC) should continue for at least another year due to a number of ongoing activities and issues:

- Workgroup projects implemented this year will need follow through to completion.
- The Medicaid Policy Analysis project will most likely generate regulatory, and perhaps even legislative recommendations that will require attention.
- Official Council representation, collaboration, and coordination will be needed for the Distance Education Technology Consortium
- Strategy development is needed to promote the use of telemedicine applications in non-federally sponsored settings.

The communication infrastructure for Telemedicine is continuing to improve and is becoming less expensive. Even with the advances made so far, telemedicine within the State is

still in its infancy and its use has been on the slow track. It will need continuous nurturing and sponsorship by all involved.

Next ATAC Meeting:

May 12, 2000

UAA Commons

Room 106

9:45 am - 2:15 pm

As most of you know, Dr. Richard Mandsager is retiring from his current position as the Director of the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC). With Dr. Mandsager's upcoming departure, the membership will need to select another Co-Chair for the coming year. Commissioner Karen Perdue has agreed to continue in her role as Co-Chair.

The Council should anticipate the same amount of time commitments for Council activity this next year. Council members will have an opportunity to discuss future activity at the May 12 meeting.

The focus of the next Council meeting will be to review the last nine months of activity, which will include the following: a status report of Council projects and a report on the public/private radiology project; discussion of the Council's work plan for the next year; and a project update by the Alaska Federal Health Care Access Network (AFHCAN) project, with a staff demonstration of the clinic kiosks being deployed statewide later this summer. There will be an update from Commissioner Nan Thompson, Regulatory Commission of Alaska, on the Federal Communications Commission field hearings.

A tremendous amount of work has been accomplished by the Council since the fall of last year. Council members, workgroup participants, and consultants are to be congratulated for all their hard work and efforts!

This spring looks to be quite busy as the Council moves forward with the recommendations developed by the various workgroups and as pilot project activity begins (*see Page 2 for more details*).

For more information, visit: www.hss.state.ak.us/atac

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ALASKA TELEHEALTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

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Ron Adler, Gateway Mental Health, 225-4135, ext. 33
Wandal Winn, MD, Priv. Prac., 562-0794
Roger Schaeffer, MD, 257-4857
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Karl Brimmer, MD

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) Procurement & Contracting Department has begun soliciting Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for the following:

Telepsychiatry Pilot Projects

Two telepsychiatry RFPs have been published—a low bandwidth using telephone lines and video, and a high bandwidth using video conferencing. Both proposals are guided by the draft telepsychiatry standards that have been developed by the Telepsychiatry Workgroup.

The low bandwidth proposal is built on the work that Dr. Bill Worrall has done with the State of Alaska Department of Corrections (DOC) in which he used video phones and standard telephone lines to conduct intake interviews and monitor medication use. Dr. Worrall conducted over 1,000 telepsychiatry consultations using this method. This level of technology has its limitations (inability to see rapid movements and modest resolution); however, the price is right. The technology is easy to use, reliable, and might be useful to the numerous statewide rural community mental health centers. The proposal will explore use of the technology in a setting outside of the DOC. The original deadline of April 1 was extended to April 14 at the request of several potential respondents. The Telepsychiatry Workgroup expects to review three proposals and award a contract before the May 12 meeting.

The high bandwidth proposal (>125kps) was advertised the weekend of April 10. This proposal is directed at clinics that have higher bandwidth, but no on-site psychiatrist. The fundamental question is what are the additional diagnostic and treatment possibilities as more bandwidth is used. This project is being supported by the Alaska Mental Health Trust, with the contractual award made through ANTHC.

Medicaid Policy Analysis

This RFP was sent out mid-March to six interested parties, and much to the Reimbursement Workgroup's surprise, none of the parties responded to the proposal. Vonne Mason from the Reimbursement Workgroup contacted all of the interested parties for feedback. The principal reason for the non-response was the short turn-around time and the lack of understanding the RFP focus. Ms. Mason's calls stimulated interest and the RFP is being reissued on April 14 with a revised timeline. The workgroup hopes to award the contract by May 30.

Telemedicine Efficacy Pilot

The Telemedicine Efficacy project has undergone several major revisions to make it simpler and more limited in scope. The RFP has been completed and should be out the week of April 17. The proposal calls for consulting practices or those who use consultants to expand their use of store and forward technology and track their experience using a standard format.

At the March 3 meeting, many of the participants were impressed with the presentation made by Dr. Richard Burger of Fairbanks Memorial Hospital in which he demonstrated his use of telemedicine applications. The Efficacy RFP encourages greater use of store and forward technology in a variety of clinical settings, mostly private, and would expand experiences beyond the cases that Dr. Burger demonstrated. The RFP would also gather enough information to make arguments for reimbursement of store and forward technology.

Technical Standards Workgroup

The Technical Standards were adopted as the "official draft" by the Council at the March 3 meeting. The standards have been shared with key telemedicine players for comment.

Western Regional Field Hearings

Federal Communications Commission representatives will be visiting Alaska to conduct field hearings and site visits the week of April 17. Demonstration of T1 lines are planned at Maniilaq and Tanana Chiefs Conference. Highlights from the visit will be included in the next newsletter.